



# Memorandum

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Councilmember Ken Yeager

SUBJECT: Illegal Tree Removal

DATE: May 22, 2006

APPROVED:

DATE:

5-22-06

## BACKGROUND:

Last year, residents of my district began contacting me to request increased fines and mitigations in response to a rise in illegal tree removals. In early October, I sent a memorandum to the Rules Committee, requesting that city staff work with my office to develop a proposal for such increased fines and mitigations. Furthermore, on April 6, I hosted a community meeting, along with city staff, to gather feedback on staff's proposed ordinance. Community members and community groups shared many additional creative ideas at this meeting, and I am pleased that staff was able to incorporate these valuable contributions into their final work product on this item. I am proud of the open, public process that has resulted in the recommendation that staff has brought forward to the Council today.

## RECOMMENDATION:

Approve staff's recommendation, along with the following further recommendations, to be included in future work related to this item:

- Clarification of the process to report potential illegal tree removals, including exploring the possibility of establishing a tree removal "hotline" to simplify the reporting process by providing just one dedicated telephone number to call.
- Explore restoring the Arborist Technician position to the City Arborist's Office that is proposed to be transferred to special assessment districts in the 2006-2007 Operating Budget. The transfer as proposed is expected to result in a slower response to customer requests for tree service and thus negatively impact the operational service measure relating to Arborist Office customer inquiries.

(OVER)

- Explore a mechanism by which fees collected from illegal tree removals could be reinvested into the program in order to lower or eliminate the permit fee for private property trees. At the community meeting, much was said about the cost of the permit fee being an incentive to remove private property trees illegally. In addition to the suggestion that was discussed between Our City Forest, city staff, and my office of splitting the incremental increased fine revenues between Arborist Office technology needs and Our City Forest education and outreach efforts, this proposal will encourage customers to utilize the established process.
- As an alternative to paying the fines for illegal tree removals for those who might have an economic hardship, explore the possibility of offering a mandatory, day-long education requirement through Our City Forest.
- Recommend that Department of Transportation/Arborist Office staff revisit the City's tree pruning policies with an eye toward reducing the incidents of improper pruning in our urban forest. Residents and community groups emphasized that the concerns surrounding illegal and improper pruning are on par with those related to illegal tree removal. Our City Forest also indicated that improperly pruning and topping trees diminishes valuable environmental and economic tree benefits and causes visual blight and early tree death. I encourage staff to work with Our City Forest to develop a training program for tree trimmers that emphasizes early pruning and proper tree pruning techniques.